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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003712

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SUBJECT: SONS OF IRAQ TRANSITION IN BAGHDAD

Classified By: PMIN Robert Ford. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary. Transition of Sons of Iraq contracts and payment of the 50,135 registered Baghdad SOI is nearly complete, with only a few reports of discrepancies or problems. Beginning in December, the GOI will proceed with SOI registration in Diyala, Qadisiya, Wasit and Babil in preparation for January GOI payments in those provinces. As SOI transition proceeds, the Iraqi Army will undertake a greater measure of command responsibility for SOI units, a process that will require continued CF mentoring. SOI continue to be concerned about GOI arrests of SOI leaders. There is also concern regarding large-scale roundups of SOI without judicial warrants by local Iraqi Army units. A few such incidents have occurred recently, with allegations of SOI intimidation of the local populace the usual justification cited. This issue will require strong CF oversight to monitor IA treatment of SOI units as the transition to GOI security control proceeds. SOI transition to security or civilian employment remains a longer-term challenge, though new signs of movement are apparent on SOI hiring into the Iraqi police in Baghdad and Diyala. Finally, The upcoming transition in Diyala requires particular attention due to the history of AQI activity and deep-seated sectarian tension in the province. End Summary.

Baghdad SOI Get New Paymaster

2. (C) Between November 10-19, Iraqi Army and National Police units of the Baghdad Operations Command (BOC) completed the first pay period for the 50,135 registered Sons of Iraq (SOI) located in the BOC area of operations (roughly the limits of Baghdad province). Coalition Forces report that BOC units successfully paid SOI associated with 383 of 385 contracts. Two contracts in south Baghdad consisting of 1,421 SOI were inadvertently left off the pay roster submitted by the local Iraqi Army brigade. The Coalition Force unit in that area will pay those SOI salaries to ensure the SOI pay is not delayed until the problem can be resolved. (Note: SOI throughout Iraq are grouped in approximately 778 individual contracts, with 385 of those in Baghdad. End note.) Another reported difficulty was an absence in several instances of sufficient cash on hand to pay the full salary of SOI leaders (who earn USD 425 per month). The deficit in leader pay was resolved in all instances in subsequent days without incident. In this first pay activity, Baghdad SOI received the entire USD 300 monthly salary regardless of absence or tardiness. However, like all Iraq Security Force (ISF) elements, Baghdad SOI will be docked pay for absence or tardiness in future months. Overall, this first ISF-led SOI payday operation should be considered a success.

Next on the SOI Transfer Timetable

13. (C) SOI transition will continue in Baghdad, with Coalition Forces monitoring GOI treatment of SOI units and continuing to participate in payday activities in the coming months. In December, the GOI will begin registering SOI for transition towards a January GOI pay date in the provinces of Diyala (8,124 SOI), Qadisiyah (1,860 SOI), Babil (5,190 SOI) and Wasit (1,171 SOI). As in Baghdad, SOI in those provinces will be required to complete registration forms, with their identities verified by their local SOI leader, ISF and CF representatives. Of these provinces, Diyala is assessed to be the greatest challenge due to the history of Al Qaeda activity in the Diyala River Qdue to the history of Al Qaeda activity in the Diyala River Valley as well as ongoing sectarian tension in the province. In order to address concerns regarding the transfer of SOI contracts, MND-North organized meetings of SOI leaders on November 17 and 19 at FOB Gabe (Baqouba) and FOB Normandy (Muqdadiyah), respectively, with representatives of MNC-I, FSEC, the Iraqi Ground Forces Command (IGFC), the Diyala Operations Command (DOC) and the Prime Minister's Implementation and Follow Up Committee for National Reconciliation (IFCNR) to explain to SOI leaders the GOI's commitment to a smooth transition from CF to GOI control. (Note: MNCI has lead CF responsibility for SOI transition, working through MND's and corresponding Iraqi Army or National Police units. In Baghdad, SOI transition was coordinated on the ground between MND-Baghdad and MND-Center working with the BOC. In Diyala, MND-North will be teamed with the Diyala Operations Command. End note.)

SOI Arrests Remain a Concern

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14. (C) In the Diyala SOI meetings and in conversations with Embassy and MNFI officers, SOI leaders and Sunni political figures routinely raise concerns regarding GOI arrests of SOI leaders. Despite their achievements and sacrifice in effecting improved security throughout Iraq, allegations persist of ongoing SOI links to Sunni resistance activity. Sunnis fear these allegations will motivate GOI arrests of SOI once the transition is complete. Coalition and Embassy officers have pressed the GOI for commitments against such arrests. Prime Minister Maliki has responded to these concerns by issuing instructions to GOI security elements not to arrest SOI for acts committed prior to joining the SOI with the exception of murder. Implementing instructions on SOI transition issued November 4 by IFCNR include establishment of a joint legal advisory committee composed of representatives of the MOD, MOI, BOC and the Supreme Judicial Council to monitor warrants and actions undertaken to arrest SOI. This committee is intended to ensure that the serving of warrants and arrests are undertaken in the spirit of the Prime Minister's instructions. The SJC has so far refused to appoint a representative to this proposed committee, objecting to a non-judicial body reviewing warrant issuance; IFCNR is working to arrive at a workable arrangement that establishes effective communication with the judiciary but does not violate judicial independence.

15. (C) MNC-I maintains a tracking and reporting mechanism to monitor incidents of SOI detentions. To date, the incidence of SOI arrests has been small when balanced against overall SOI numbers, but several high-profile cases have caused anxiety within SOI ranks. Among those is the 21 October arrest of Diyala SOI leader Laith Saleh Abdel Karim (aka Abu Ali) based on a warrant citing insurgent activities in 2005-06. CF intervention to release Abdel Karim made progress until new accusations surfaced of Abu Ali's involvement in the murder of two Iraqi Police officers subsequent to his joining the SOI. Abu Ali is reported by the GOI to have confessed to the murders while under interrogation in detention. Additionally, CF learned

on November 21 of the arrest by ISF units of another Diyala SOI leader, Diyala People's Committee Chair Mulla Shihab. Mulla Shihab leads SOI in the Buhriz district of Diyala. CF are seeking additional information regarding both cases and will continue to engage GOI officials at the provincial and national level to prevent an escalation of tension as the Diyala SOI transition nears. Apart from reports like these of arrests of SOI leaders, concern also exists regarding large-scale roundups of SOI without judicial warrants by local IA units. A few such incidents have occurred recently, with allegations of SOI intimidation of the local populace the usual justification cited. This issue will require strong CF oversight to monitor IA treatment of SOI units as the transition to GOI security control proceeds.

Hiring SOI into the ISF

16. (C) Another principal issue of concern for SOI and Sunni political figures is the longer-term fate of SOI transitioned to GOI control. In Prime Ministerial Order 118c issued 8 September that instructs the government to take on SOI contracts, the Prime Minister committed to paying SOI until they found security or civilian employment (para 5, PM Order 118c). In IFCNR's implementing instructions, the GOI committed to finding employment for 20 percent of SOI in the ranks of the Iraqi Security Forces and for the remaining 80 percent in GOI civilian ministries and departments (para 3, IFCNR Implementing Instructions). The GOI appears to be following through and has issued hiring orders for 2,750 SOI from those transferred in Baghdad in the past several weeks and the MOI has committed to hiring an additional 9,300 Baghdad SOI into the Iraqi police. In his comments before Diyala SOI on November 19 at FOB Normandy, IFCNR's MG Muzhir said 3,118 Diyala police billets had been set aside for SOI. CF and Embassy officers will continue to press GOI officials on SOI hiring, an issue of keen importance to Iraq's Sunni community.

Comment

17. (C) Despite many worries several months ago, in fact SOI transition to date in Baghdad has proceeded smoothly, a testament to the tremendous effort put in by Coalition Forces of MND-Baghdad and MND-Center in cooperation with Iraqi counterparts in the Baghdad Operations Command. Prime Minister Maliki also deserves

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credit for understanding the risks inherent in a botched transition and directing his government to approach this task professionally and in a manner that calms Sunni fears about unfair treatment. CF will need to remain close to the process to ensure counterpart ISF and SOI units are able to work together and maintain security, the primary objective through the transition. The upcoming transition in Diyala requires particular attention due to the history of AQI activity and deep-seated sectarian tension in the province. End Comment.

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